

"LEGS? I Never Had Any. And Don't Need Any"

Madame Guenther the Remarkable Personage with the Barnum-Ringling Circus Explains Why She Is Better Off Than Venus de Milo Without Any Arms

MADAME GABRIELLE GUENTHER is the only woman in the world who never had to learn to walk, for the simple reason that nature never provided her anything to walk with.

While perfectly normal in every other way, physically and mentally, nature failed to fulfil all its obligations to her and allowed her to come into the world minus almost half of her body. Nevertheless, she has lived a healthy, quite happy existence for thirty-six years, and has scarcely reached the prime of her life.

Such an extraordinary and exceptional prank of nature is this that the thousands of people who see her daily at the Ringling Circus at Madison Square Garden can hardly believe their eyes. Some of the incredulous insist that there is some illusion about it, while others declare that in some way she must have her legs folded tightly under her. This is really not strange, for it is hard for anyone to believe that a person could actually be born and live healthily the allotted span of years so handicapped—and in every other way be so normal.

But it is so. Madame Guenther is a living proof that nature will play a cruel trick and then adjust itself to the extraordinary resultant conditions. Aside from the inconvenience of being deprived of the natural means of locomotion, Miss Guenther lives a perfectly normal life. She had the benefit of a thorough education in a convent when a girl, before she began to tour the world in entertainments.

"No. Please don't sympathize with me," said Madame Guenther, with an amiable smile. "A woman really does not need legs. I never had any and yet I can do almost anything that other people can do, and I get along perfectly well without any legs. The people to be sorry for are the deaf, the blind, the dumb—not the legless. I get about my home perfectly well. I can move around about as fast as anybody else. I enjoy life just as much as others and in just about the same way."

"Of course, I have been an object of considerable interest to medical men," she continued. "Anatomists, ethnologists, bone specialists, and all kinds of scientists have felt of me and pinched me and X-rayed me and examined me and studied me. They are not all agreed about me—many think I have no scientific excuse for being alive at all; that I am a scientific impossibility. But the consensus of opinion seems to be that I simply stopped short at my hip bones. You know that we are entitled to have a pair of leg bones which fit into the big hip sockets and continue on down, forming our legs."

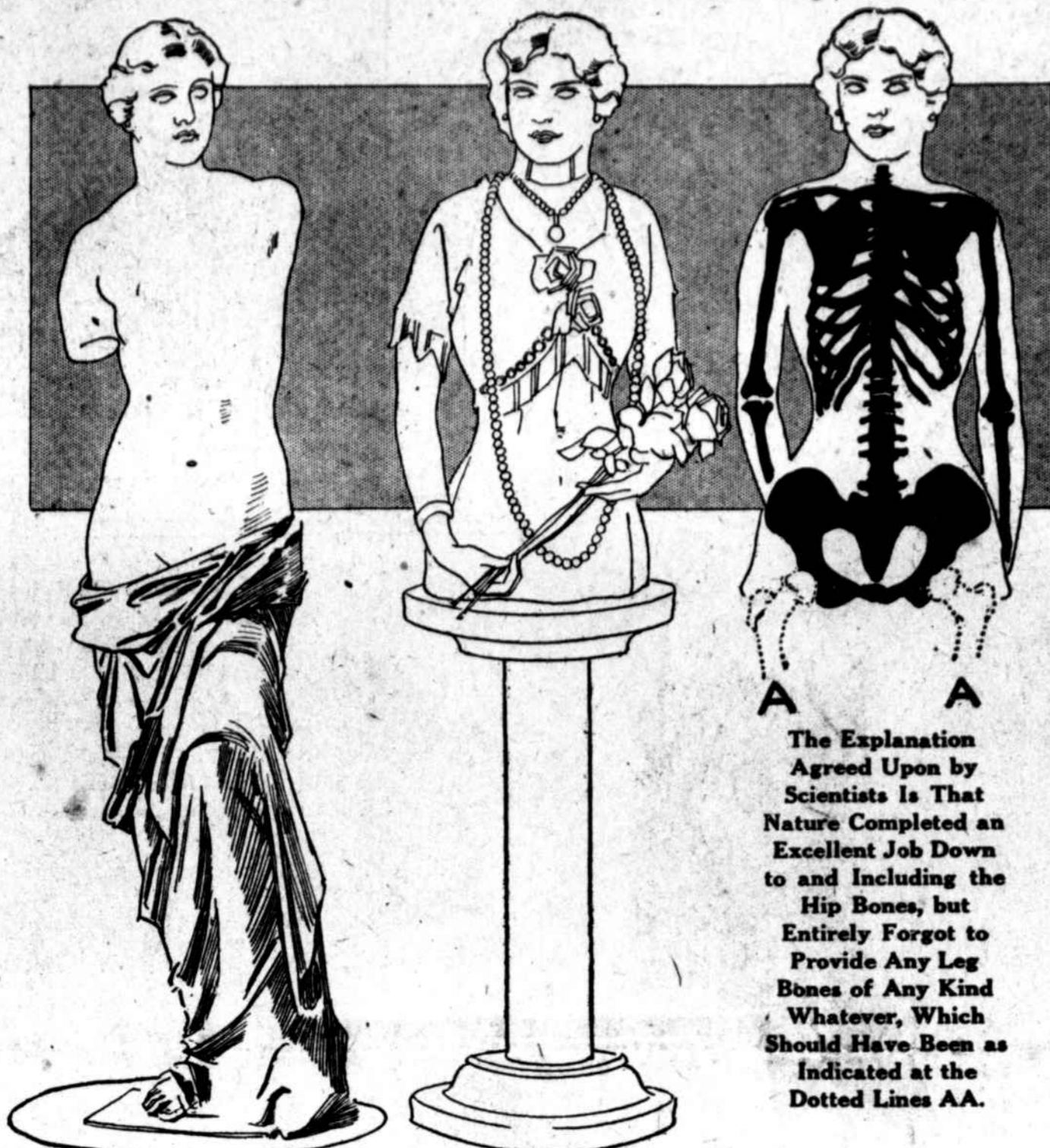
"Well, they seem pretty well agreed that nature started at my head and made a perfectly good average, successful and complete job of me in all respects down to and including my hip bones. And then, for some reason, nature went on strike, quit then and there and never came back to give me even just the slightest rudimentary kind of leg bones of any manner or shape. So there I was and always have been, just like a statue moulded by a sculptor down to that point and who never returned to finish his job."

"I was asked once whether I would rather be the Venus de Milo with an able bodied pair of legs and no arms, or myself with a very able pair of arms and no lower limbs. Well, the unfortunate Venus has nothing on me. I would not swap my arms for her legs. If I should meet the famous lady of the Louvre in real life I should extend to her my sincerest sympathy." Madame Guenther said with much earnestness.

It is of little inconvenience for her to get around her apartment. With the aid of her hands she "walks" about rapidly—on her hands and hips. By twisting adroitly about she can get into a chair gracefully and with astonishing ease. Grasping the chair with one hand and with the other on the floor she swings her hips on to the chair and half pushes and half pulls herself upright into it. A rocking chair is her favorite seat. While upright she considers that she is standing. For sitting she leans backward in the rocker, thus reclining and resting.

While dressing she "stands" on a chair before her dresser mirror to arrange her hair. Standing thus only brings her shoulders into view in the mirror, and in order to inspect the remainder of her attire she lifts herself to the top of the dresser, where she can view her entire length as the average woman can contemplate herself in a cheval glass. She can go up and down stairs with alacrity by holding to the railing with one hand and placing the other on the steps.

"There are lots and lots of people in the world," said Madame Guenther, "who



The Explanation Agreed Upon by Scientists Is That Nature Completed an Excellent Job Down to and Including the Hip Bones, but Entirely Forgot to Provide Any Leg Bones of Any Kind Whatever, Which Should Have Been as Indicated at the Dotted Lines AA.

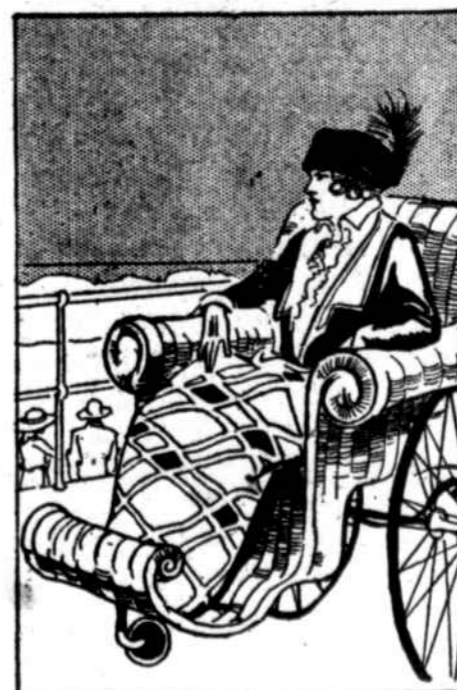
The Venus de Milo, with a Fine Pair of Lower Limbs But No Arms, —and— Madame Guenther, with an Unusual Pair of Arms But No Lower Limbs.



At Her Dressing Table.



Going to See "Mme. Butterfly" at the Metropolitan Opera House.



In Her Wheel-Chair.

are a great deal worse off than I am, who have far less to live for and who have but a fraction of the pleasure that I get out of life. When I grew to the age when girls are allowed to go out of doors and play, it was then that the realization came to me of my unusual handicap. I could get about the house, but I could not play with the other children, and that, of course, resulted in my being more or less neglected in a way. I was a child apart from the others—an outsider, as it were. In my childish way I began to realize with what a handicap I had to face life, and, naturally, I grew a little despondent about everything. My parents were fairly well-to-do and I had every comfort and was not neglected, but I began to grow unhappy, nevertheless.

"But one time I was taken to an institution where I saw a number of blind children and children who were badly crippled and otherwise mistreated by fate, and then and there I realized that my lot wasn't so bad after all. Even though a child I could appreciate the fact that I was possessed of all my faculties and senses. I could read, talk, hear, understand and appreciate and enjoy the beauties of life. I could read and they couldn't. I could talk with my friends, but some of them couldn't because they were dumb. I could hear and enjoy beautiful music, while some of them couldn't because they were deaf. I had my mental faculties and began to look forward to my education, and some of them couldn't because they were idiots. The visit to that institution, unpleasant though it was because of the misery that I saw, was the best thing that could have happened to me. From that time to this I have never complained. I couldn't play or romp about, but neither could many of the children I saw that day, because they were blind."

"The other day I saw Helen Keller at a vaudeville theatre here, and when I con-

templated what her life had been—deaf, dumb and blind since childhood—I realized more than ever how much more unfortunate she was than I.

"As a child I never had to run errands. I am never asked to pump a player-piano and I should worry about the high prices of shoes and silk stockings."

"Of course, it was a great shock to my parents that I was born as I was, but when they found that I was perfectly normal every other way they, too, began to be philosophical about it. I was born in Switzerland, but when I was quite young my family moved to Austria. Wherever we went I was, of course, considered a curiosity, and while at first their curious, critical gazes were considerably embarrassing I gradually became used to them. It was natural for everyone to suggest to my parents that I be put into the show business. But my father said no, emphatically, at least until I should have gained an education. He said he could foresee eventually that I might travel, but that he would not allow it until I had had the benefit of an education. When I was old enough I was placed in a convent, where I spent several years. My father died when I was twelve years old."

"It was about that time that my mother happened to visit a museum in the city in Austria in which we lived—a travelling museum owned and managed by an American showman. One of the attractions of this outfit was a 'legless' woman; that is, one of those alleged legless women where the legless effect is gained by the well-

known use of mirrors, thereby creating the illusion. My mother saw this attraction, and not being familiar with the trick by which the illusion was effected believed the woman to be without legs. The moment she saw it she burst into tears; in fact, became so hysterical that attendants of the show came to her and tried to quiet her and asked what the matter was."

"While they were talking to her the manager of the show himself happened along and asked my mother what the trouble was. Between her sobs she explained, pointing to the 'legless' woman, that she had a daughter just like that at home. The manager at first scarcely paid any attention to that statement, but gradually he realized that my mother was trying to tell him that she actually had a legless daughter. First he quieted my mother by showing her how the illusion was worked and proving that this particular woman had the customary outfit of lower limbs. Then he began to ask my mother questions with the object in view of getting her to let me join his show."

"My mother told him that she would not consider it at that time as I was too young. He was very nice about it and did not insist on her letting me go with him, but exacted a promise that when the time came that she was willing that I should leave home to travel he might have the option on my services. He came to our home and we had a talk and then he disappeared."

have been travelling for the most of my life ever since."

Madame Guenther weighs 85 pounds. Physicians who have examined her compute that her weight would be 125 pounds if her body had its full complement.

She eats probably 25 per cent less than the average woman.

"I eat when I feel like it," she said, "and not a great deal unless," smiling, "it is something I am particularly fond of, such as chicken, spaghetti and salads. But eating doesn't worry me much."

"And this matter of how much I eat has been a subject of very keen interest to the scientists who have studied me. They have estimated the weight of my missing lower limbs and have calculated what percentage of nourishment would have been necessary to create the blood to supply and sustain the muscles, nerves and tissues of a pair of legs for me. If I had a pair of legs I would have to take in enough nourishment to keep them going. But since I have not any legs, do I consume less food than the average person of my general build?"

"All this has aroused much discussion and interest, and my 'food intake,' as they call it, and diet have been watched and examined. They say that my appetite and the food I eat is just about as much less than the normal as my lack of lower limbs would seem to require."

"Another interesting thing which has attracted the attention of the heart special-

ists is the question whether my heart is stronger and will last longer than the average woman's heart because it has less work to do. The doctors have explained to me that the heart is a pump. Most people's hearts have to raise the blood four or five feet from the toes up to the level of the heart. This is, of course, a much more taxing and wearing thing than to pump the blood less than two feet—as in my case. The problem of interest for the heart specialists has been whether my heart will outlast the heart of my childhood friends and schoolmates, because their hearts have to work pumping blood in and out to the end of their toes, while my heart pumps blood only to the hips.

"There is one curious thing though. You have heard of people having their legs or arms amputated and then afterwards complaining of pain in the cut off members. It is a fact that although I have never had legs and don't know anything about them personally, there have been times when I have felt most uncannily that I did have them! I mean by that a sensation as of prolongations from my hips. I have often wondered whether I did really feel this or whether it was not ancestral memory stirring in my own brain. I mean the memory of my two-legged ancestors that I have inherited."

"And what a jolly time these specialists will have when I die! Every time they come to study me I realize that they are looking forward to the day when they can perform an autopsy and gather around my peculiar anatomy and study it and thoroughly enjoy themselves. I hope I may provide them with increased knowledge before I am buried, so that my misfortune will have really been of some usefulness to mankind."

When the madame essays an outing her faithful husband, Honus, is always on the job. He carries her to her wheel-chair, tucks her in and pushes her about wherever she wishes to go. When she goes out she wears a long dress or, at least, a dress as long as they're wearing now. A few days ago she attended the opera and heard "Madame Butterfly." "It was very beautiful," she mused, through half-closed eyes, "I love the opera." No one is the wiser when she attends the theatre. Her husband has a way of carrying her which camouflages everything and they enter after the lights are turned down.

Madame Guenther and her husband have been married several years and are thoroughly devoted. Honus says he has less to worry about than most husbands, as he never worries about his wife running away from him.

Mme. Gabrielle Guenther Receiving Callers at Home.

